UNITED NATIONS

WORLD CHRONICLE

PROGRAMME: No. 507, recorded 7 April 1993

GUEST: **DJIBRIL DIALLO**
Special Assistant to the Executive Director
UNICEF

JOURNALISTS: Obi Emekekwue, News Agency of Nigeria
Jon Leyne, BBC
Afsane Bassir Pour, *Le Monde*

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

CHILDREN OF AFRICA

Djibril Diallo, Special Assistant to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), elaborates on what the African continent needs to improve the lot of its children. He declares that the problems facing Africa are universal in nature and should be dealt with on the international level. Mr. Diallo calls on the African countries to embark on a massive educational programme as the best way to ensure a better future for the children of Africa. He also appeals to the international community not to forget Africa in view of the rising need for assistance in other parts of the world.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Information Products Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration:	28:00"
Executive Producer:	Kamil Taha
Director:	Ivan Stoynov
Production Assistant:	Ellen McGuffie

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is WORLD CHRONICLE, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's WORLD CHRONICLE.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is WORLD CHRONICLE.

Over the last few decades, the predominant image of the African continent has been one of misfortune: devastating poverty, rampant disease and inadequate education, as well as natural and man-made disasters. The most affected by this human dilemma are the children of Africa. What must the international community do to call attention to the suffering of the African children? And what steps should be taken to alleviate their plight?

Our guest today has a special interest in and commitment to Africa and its children. He is Djibril Diallo, Special Assistant to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, or UNICEF. A national of Senegal, Mr. Diallo will be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Obi Emekekwue of the News Agency of Nigeria, Jon Leyne of the BBC, and Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde*.

Before we talk with Mr. Diallo, let's look at one aspect of UNICEF's efforts to focus international attention on the needs of the children of Africa. Our correspondent David Tereshchuk reports.

NARRATION:

You might think that you're in Africa, but in fact it's New York. Organized by the United Nations Children's Fund, hundreds of American and African children gathered at the U.N. Headquarters to celebrate the Day of the African Child.

It was a day to share their cultures, to remember the plight of African children, and above all, it was a day to celebrate the many achievements of Africa itself, which all too often can go unnoticed.

One island of hope is in Guinea, one of the poorest countries in Africa. It's part of a quiet revolution that has been sweeping across Africa since 1987. That was the year when African Ministers of Health launched the Bamako Initiative.

The idea of Bamako was to provide better health services through partnerships between local communities, national governments and international organizations. In Guinea, the United Nations Children's Fund is supplying free drugs and is paying to train health workers to get the programme under way.

But the heart of the Bamako Initiative is community investment. People are willing to spend money, even when it's scarce, on treatment and medicine for their families. In health centres, essential drugs are sold to patients at low cost. This market approach will generate private funds to complement those that the government provides and bring in enough money to re-supply the pharmacy.

These clinics are run by elected local village committees. They will also decide how to spend the future profits from the health centres.

Besides providing curative services, many of them are extending into the countryside to bring preventive medicine, such as vaccination, to the villages. The Bamako Initiative is evidence that Africa is struggling to be self-supporting, even in the toughest of times. Drought and famine, war and debt are no deterrent to a people determined to get the best for their children.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Diallo, thanks to television images and still photographs, we're all rather well aware of the tragedy of children starving and dying in Somalia and Ethiopia. Are these exceptions in Africa, or is the problem very widespread throughout the continent?

DIALLO: The problem is very widespread throughout the continent, and the challenge is for these images not to take us into lethargy, into inaction. Because the challenge in Africa is tremendous. Thirty million Africans are poverty stricken. Twenty million Africans are refugees. And as if that's not bad enough, we've got the scourge of AIDS that is burning the continent. And of course, those who are the most severely stricken in all of this are women and children.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mentioned AIDS. How serious is that problem?

DIALLO: AIDS is a very, very serious problem because it runs the risk of wiping out all the social and human gains that have been made over the last decade. In countries in eastern and southern Africa it's a very, very serious problem, but it is being confronted by Africans and by UNICEF and its partners in the same way that we confronted diseases through massive immunization campaigns, that is, to lay emphasis on

education. Because, after all, the only tool that we have to fight AIDS is education. So the sooner we implement massive educational programmes, the better we will be.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Diallo, your agency, UNICEF, has poured hundreds of millions of dollars over the years into African assistance. Do you feel that you've made a dent on the problem?

DIALLO: I think that the answer is much more for the Africans to say so. And some of us who crisscross the continent can see that these resources have not gone into a bottomless pit, that they have made a tremendous difference. The question is that this is not the time for the international community to relax its assistance to Africa. And unfortunately, current trends tend to point to the fact that Africa is becoming more and more a forgotten continent. This is unacceptable. A bank for the reconstruction of Eastern Europe [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development] has recently been created, with $10 billion American dollars put aside to assist former Eastern European countries. Resources of such scale are not forthcoming for Africa, and this is something that needs the attention of the international community as urgently as possible.

EMEKEKWUE: Mr. Diallo, every year UNICEF organizes the celebration of the Day of the African Child. How much has this activity succeeded in drawing attention to the problems of the African children?

DIALLO: Let me start by emphasizing that the Day of the African Child is the result of a resolution by Africans themselves. Therefore it's the Organization of African Unity that asks UNICEF to help to make this a success. This is very important, because every year June 16th becomes the central switchboard against which Africa and its partners gauge progress, for child survival, for child protection, and for child development. Therefore it's a very, very important measure, a snapshot of the state of the African child reviewed year in, year out.

LEYNE: Mr. Diallo, you've spoken about the amount of money being funnelled into Eastern Europe: don't you have a serious problem now that Africa is not on anybody's strategic map? It's not important to the rest of the world any more.

DIALLO: This is a serious challenge, but at the same time, in today's world we are -- our generation lives in the world where the concept of the global village has become much more of a reality than ever before. Therefore troubles in one part of the village are bound to have repercussions in other parts of the village. And I think this is

a message which is being heard more loudly than before, and we hope that that will lead to more assistance being forthcoming to the African continent.

BASSIR POUR: Mr. Diallo, this year the Day of the African Child happens to coincide with the Human Rights Summit in Vienna. Will you be represented there, and what can the world leaders promise the African child that they already haven't?

DIALLO: UNICEF and its partners are working actively with the United Nations bodies and other partners for the preparation for the Vienna Human Rights Conference. And as coincidence would have it, June 16th will be commemorated in Vienna through the message from a child from South Africa. Because after all, it's the massacres in Soweto on the 16th of June 1976 which are at the origin of setting up June 16th as the Day of the African Child. Therefore the African child will be remembered and the needs of children worldwide will be focused upon at the Vienna Human Rights Conference.

EMEKEKWUE: Mr. Diallo, the UNICEF Report on the State of the World's Children speaks of local strategies for protecting children. What are these strategies, and what will it cost to implement them in Africa?

DIALLO: When Mr. Grant, the Executive Director of UNICEF, starting discussing this concept of local strategies with our African partners, he went from the premise that these are very tough days internationally, that there is not going to be a substantial injection of additional resources from outside Africa in the coming years. Therefore, what are the strategies that Africans can focus upon to make a difference for Africa's children while waiting for the international atmosphere to improve? Such strategies include immunization programmes, for instance, to raise the level of immunization throughout Africa from its current level of 75 per cent to about 80 per cent; trying to bring about access to education, basic education, especially educating the girl child; and trying to promote breast feeding, for instance. Some of those low cost measures which do not require substantial resources from outside Africa.

LEYNE: One of the problems about days like this is they do tend to focus on rather negative images. Can you say whether the global picture for African children is actually improving?

DIALLO: The future of the African child today is brighter than that of his father or his grandfather. The question is that we've got to make sure that this attention that has been given to the African child is sustained. The Executive Board of UNICEF

decided that the 1990s will be a decade for priority for Africa, during which the organization will devote a substantial part of its resources and its staff to implementing child survival, child protection, and child development programmes.

BASSIR POUR: Mr. Diallo, are the African-American children part of your programme? And do the leaders of the African-American community participate in your activities?

DIALLO: The African-American community is a community which descends from Africa, therefore which has got natural emotional links with Africa. Therefore its role, as far as Africa is concerned, is very important. And in the past, the African-American community has contributed substantially to the successful commemoration of the Day of the African Child. But let me hasten to add that Africa's problems are universal problems, so it's not a question of race. I think it would be a mistake to think that only Africans and peoples of African descent should try to help Africa. It's a human problem which should be dealt with by the international community at large.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Diallo, you mentioned that $10 billion has been raised in capital for this bank for the development of Eastern Europe, or the reconstruction of Eastern Europe. How much money has been spent in aid assistance, aid and relief assistance, in Africa?

DIALLO: I do not have the figures at hand, but what I can show you is that last November the Organization for African Unity sponsored an International Conference on Assistance to African Children, during which Africa came to the negotiating table with the industrialized nations. And the result has been a document that is called the Dakar Consensus, a document committing Africa and the international community to restructure budgets in favour of Africa's children. That document estimates that for the coming years, between now and the year 2000, some $4.8 billion American dollars will be needed for Africa. And again, let me say very quickly that half of that money is to come from within Africa. Therefore, gone are the days when one is thinking about substantial injection of resources into Africa without checks and balances or without accountability. $8.8 billion, half of which is to come from within Africa itself.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is World Chronicle, our guest is Djibril Diallo, Special Assistant to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund. Obi Emekekwue.

EMEKEKWUE: Yes, Mr. Diallo, part of the problem in Africa seems to be the allocation of resources; you know, you don't have enough resources going to the problems of children. So how is UNICEF trying to get African governments to devote more resources to these particular problems?

DIALLO: One of the strongest points that UNICEF has is its global experience. So UNICEF can go to its partners in Africa and show how countries which are doing well today came where they are today. If we look at what is happening in Asia, with the newly industrialized countries, many of these countries laid a lot of emphasis on human development, that is, health and education, as a basis for their development. Therefore if you look at Japan, if you look at Korea, if you look at Hong Kong, all of these countries do not have substantial natural resources, but what they have is human resource development. Therefore, through that kind of cohesive dialogue with partners, I think that Africa has made a tremendous difference in terms of developing its human resources, which is focusing on basic health, education, and access to clean water.

LEYNE: I don't need to tell you that there's been a wave of political change in Africa in the last few years -- democratization, emphasis on the market economy. Do you think this is helping or harming African children? Things like having to meet IMF targets, for instance.

DIALLO: First point, democracy is very good for children. Because it unleashes creative forces throughout a nation. Second point, structural adjustment measures do hurt African economies generally, but what has been developed in UNICEF and has been accepted now internationally is that wherever there is adjustment, such adjustment should have a human face. That is, vulnerable groups should not be the ones who pay the price of structural adjustment measures.

BASSIR POUR: Mr. Diallo, I'd like to go back to the pandemic of AIDS that has struck Africa. I was reading that 13 per cent of Ugandan children are orphans, 10 per cent due to AIDS. What concretely can UNICEF or the UN as a system do for these orphans?

DIALLO: The Organization is trying to do a lot, because what AIDS is doing is leading to the disintegration of the African family. One thing that is strong in Africa is strong family ties. As an African walking in the streets of New York, I'm always struck -- because I happen to be living in New York -- I'm always struck by the problem of homelessness, for instance, people sleeping in the streets, whereas in Africa generally

people are not very well off, but people care for each other. Therefore, AIDS is having an impact on that. We are having more and more abandoned children in the streets. Therefore, to counter that situation measures are being taken to ensure that those children are provided with food, shelter, clothing, and wherever appropriate they are put in conditions where they can have basic education and have a better future. But it's a very, very serious problem. I myself have been in Uganda, I've visited a hospital for AIDS orphans outside Kampala -- it's a devastating picture that I still have with me.

BASSIR POUR: Are these units provided by UNICEF, or do you encourage the African countries themselves -- Uganda you were mentioning -- to provide shelter for these children? How is it done?

DIALLO: Well, we go from the premise that any program in a country is first and foremost a programme of the government and its people. So whatever resources we provide are in addition to what Africans themselves provide. Therefore, we have UNICEF assistance, we have non-governmental organizations, both indigenous and from outside Africa, who are trying to help. But the needs are great, and we have to focus on the concept of additionality. That is, additional resources coming from both Africa and outside Africa.

And on the African side, you see, when I mention resources coming from Africa, very often people say, but that's not possible, this continent is so devastated, how could they have additional resources? But with the end of the cold war, and also the democratic process, there are resources from military spending that could be used for the social sector. Countries like Benin, like Uganda, like Zimbabwe have demonstrated that this is possible. Therefore resources are available in Africa which can be unleashed for the social sector development.

EMEKEKWUE: The UNICEF immunization programme was a major success in Africa, but in spite of that, in fact, mortality remains higher on the continent. So what new approaches is UNICEF adopting to tackle this problem?

DIALLO: Let me start by saying that today immunization levels in Harare, Zimbabwe, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, are higher than immunization levels in New York City or in London. That's a major feat, regarding if one considers the difficulty that these countries are faced with. But at the same time --

LITTLEJOHNS: Now, is this because of UNICEF that this is the case?

DIALLO: This is because of a combination of factors which include political leadership, commitment of the political leadership at the highest level, and social mobilization by Africans themselves, which is supplemented by the support and the partnership of UNICEF. And just to answer your question, very quickly, as I said, the question of infant mortality rate is a very, very complex one. Therefore, for the first time in thirty years some countries have got their infant mortality rate getting worse than it was -- countries like Zambia, like Uganda. And this is very, very worrying, because this is not the trend that is happening in other parts of the world like Asia or Latin America.

LEYNE: What would you say now is the single most important problem facing the African child?

DIALLO: I think the single most important problem facing the African child is the need for that child not to be forgotten -- not to be forgotten by African leaders, and especially not to be forgotten by the international community. This is very, very important, because these children are going to grow up, they are going to be the leaders of tomorrow, and what future is there for Africa if today 10,000 African children die every 24 hours, and another 10,000 are crippled for life? That means that every 24 hours 20,000 African children are wasted. That is just devastating. And there are lots of things that can be done to improve that situation at very, very low cost.

BASSIR POUR: What role would you like to see the religious leaders play in your task? And also explain what the attitude of the religious leaders, especially the Catholic leaders in Africa, is towards AIDS.

DIALLO: Religious leaders play a very, very important role, because they are part of what Mr. Grant, the Executive Director of UNICEF, has called the "grand alliance for children". I have recently been in Egypt, where I visited the University of Al-Azhar, which is a very, very prestigious institution for Islamic countries. Through Al-Azhar, we managed to get quotations from the Koran that show that it is a crime for a Muslim to neglect his or her child. And such exercises with other religions. Therefore it's very important to continue the partnership with religious leaders, so that the Catholic priest can get up on a Sunday when he's talking and talk about child survival and development. It's not UNICEF that is doing it, it's the religious leader. The Moslem on Friday doing the same thing. So that this is part of ongoing work dealing with religious leaders. And we have not encountered particular hurdles with the Christian community

as far as the fight against AIDS is concerned, it's a problem which is worrying everybody and anybody who's concerned about the welfare of the African continent.

LITTLEJOHNS: But surely you've come into contact with problems as regards contraception and the Catholic Church in Africa, and one of the problems is the exploding population.

DIALLO: I think that one of the worst services that we can render to African children is just to reduce the debate to snapshot ideas like contraception, over-population and ideas like that. I think that we have got to widen the debate, to look at the issue of family planning, the issue of looking at the population of Africa in relation to availability of resources. Our experience in UNICEF is that the best contraceptive is education.

BASSIR POUR: If I may take up Michael's point, it's not just contraception, it's also the use of condoms to prevent AIDS -- I think that's also maybe what Michael was referring too -- which the Catholic Church is against.

DIALLO: I think that condoms are one of the means, one of the methods being promoted for the fight against AIDS. Other people will say to you that abstinence is even better. So we do not promote one particular use, one particular method. But what we're trying to promote is different methods which will take into account the culture, the environment in which we are operating. And I think that the use of condoms in Africa is widespread right now, and whether communities accept it or not depends on certain cultural dimensions. And what we come and do is to bring our own experience in this field.

EMEKEKWUE: Mr. Diallo, the problem of solving the problem of children in Africa requires much more support. Do you get a sense that the richer countries are willing to come out to support these initiatives?

DIALLO: I think that there have been encouraging responses from the OAU-sponsored International Conference on Assistance to African Children. Twenty-six industrialized nations were present, and among those some countries even gave a press conference to announce additional assistance to African children. But what we need to do is to build on social mobilization strategies to translate these commitments into actual resources for African children. That's not going to be easy, but it is something which is vital if we're going to talk about a future for the African continent.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you have immunization programmes throughout Africa, in all the African countries?

DIALLO: There are immunization programmes in each and every African country, and the social mobilization has just made tremendous differences.

LITTLEJOHNS: And UNICEF is responsible for these programmes in all these countries?

DIALLO: UNICEF, as the United Nations body responsible for child survival and development, is helping to coordinate these activities, but let me emphasize once again that the responsibility of all these programmes is first and foremost that of the governments themselves.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Diallo, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of World Chronicle.

Our guest has been Djibril Diallo, Special Assistant to the Executive Director of UNICEF. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Obi Emekekwue of the News Agency of Nigeria, Jon Leyne of the BBC, and Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of WORLD CHRONICLE.

* * * * * * * * * *

Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: WORLD CHRONICLE, United Nations, Room S-827, New York, New York, 10017, USA.

WORLD CHRONICLE is broadcast worldwide and features guests whose work is concerned with major global issues. This programme is a public affairs presentation of this station from United Nations Radio and Television.

Additional information material about the United Nations can be obtained by writing to the Public Inquiries Unit, United Nations, Room GA-57, New York, New York, 10017, USA, or the UN Information Centre in your country.